



Reviews

Anika Landsteiner

Sowie du mich kennst

Softcover, 352 pages, € 16.99

Kruger

The story is set in Seekirch, Lower Franconia, and Manhattan, New York.

It is narrated by Karla, a woman in her mid-30s who has just separated from her longtime boyfriend Max, a journalist for the *Seekirchner Bote*. It is also about her somewhat younger sister Marie, who had lived in Manhattan's East Village, had been a respected fashion and portrait photographer, had lived alone since separating from her American husband Adam, and recently passed away.

Karla spends a few weeks in New York during the summer cleaning out her late sister's apartment. Marie was hit by a car on busy 2nd Avenue after ignoring a red traffic light. Karla, who had a very intimate relationship with her sister, tries to comprehend and process what happened.

The reader spends unreal days with Karla in hot New York: on the one hand, as a living proxy for her sister; on the other, as a bereaved woman, full of apathy and grief. At the same time, she is a desperate actionist who has fleeting acquaintances. Overlaying everything is an impression of what goes on in the apartment across the street, where frighteningly violent marital scenes take place, prompting Karla to alert the police and make contact with the maltreated neighbor.

Anika Landsteiner demonstrates great dramaturgical aptitude in allowing dead Marie to speak again and again in the course of this story. The reader learns that she also fell victim to violence in her marriage to Adam, that she also observed dramatic scenes of violence from her fire escape. Thus, the shame and powerlessness she thought she had overcome are repeated.

Sowie du mich kennst is a finely composed, cinematic novel employing the Hitchcockian trick of allowing the reader to know more than the protagonists. Between *Rear Window* and *Friends*, but in the small-town confines of the Federal Republic of Germany, and with



the comfort of potato soup and the scent of elderberries, one experiences a book summer full of insights into foreign lives that confuse, animate, and linger in memory.

Catherine v. Uslar

Leopold Tyrmand

Filip

Hardcover, 640 pages, € 24

Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt

Filip Vincel, alias Leopold Tyrmand, is a 23-year-old Polish resistance fighter who narrowly escapes Soviet captivity in 1942 and travels to Germany via detours. Disguised as a stateless Frenchman, he volunteers for “labor duty in the Reich” with the aim of getting to England unnoticed, because he believes that only in England can one live in dignity and style.

After working as a railroad worker in Gustavsburg and Mainz, he gets a job as a waiter in Frankfurt's elegant Parkhotel. Together with his Dutch roommate Piotr and colleagues from all over the world, he creates a thoroughly enjoyable daily routine in which he cheats the hotel's illustrious guests out of ration cards, talks the good-natured patissier into giving him delicious desserts, and not infrequently steals a good bottle of Moselle wine. He spends his free time at trendy Frankfurt cafés and the fashionable Mosler bathing establishment on the banks of the Main River, where he keeps an eye out for “passable” women. When he finally falls madly in love with a German girl, his sense of honor demands that he abruptly change his life.

Filip and his friends are driven from their homeland, fall on hard times, and continue to face very immediate threats from Allied bombing as well as the go-getting Frankfurt Gestapo. It is only their faith in their youth and good looks that enables them to maintain a claim to happiness and pleasure. They don't let the scoundrel Hitler spoil their dream of a glamorous life, as depicted in American movies. They reject nationality and even “race” as irrelevant; what matters to them is elegance and poise.

Rarely has there been a more outrageous and seemingly carefree treatment of the Third Reich. Indeed, this precisely observed and immensely entertaining novel seems almost akin to modern pop literature. If it weren't for the repeated scenes of fear and uncertainty,



the story could easily be dismissed as imposture and boyish fantasy. But *Filip* encourages us to hold on to our own life's dreams—or at least to think back on them.

Catherine v. Uslar

S. A. Cosby
Blacktop Wasteland
Hardcover, 320 pages, € 22
Ars Vivendi

Beauregard tries everything to put his criminal past behind him. He opens a car repair shop, which provides him with an honest living, is a good father to his sons and a good husband to his wife. But if there's one thing we've learned about criminal pasts, it's that they eventually catch up with you. This is precisely what happens when Beauregard finds himself in such dire financial straits, through no fault of his own, on several fronts at once that he has no choice but to once again demonstrate his unique qualities as a getaway driver in a heist. One final job.

You think you already know this story, don't you?

And you think you know it's going to end badly.

After all, it's been told a hundred times before.

But not like this! It begins darkly rumbling and with evil forebodings, then gets even darker, seeming to confirm the forebodings, and later gets pitch black and evil, very evil, and then even more evil. Ouch, it really hurts. For fans of occasional total darkness, *Blacktop Wasteland* is a real event.

For me, it is the thriller discovery of the year so far.

Edgar Rai



Leila Slimani

Das Land der anderen (In the Country of Others)

Hardcover, 384 pages, € 22

Luchterhand

Just two novels were enough to catapult Leila Slimani to fame as one of France's most important literary voices. With *Lullaby*, her second, she won the Prix Goncourt, and the novel became the most widely read book of the year in France. Macron is said to have offered her the post of Minister of Culture for it, but of course she declined; after all, she sees herself as a writer.

Her third novel—*In the Country of Others*—has just been published in German, and those familiar with its two predecessors will be confronted with a surprisingly different kind of story and a different kind of narrator. For Slimani is working on a trilogy of novels, the first part of which is *In the Country of Others*, based on her family history.

Set in the aftermath of World War II, the novel centers on Mathilde, who is modeled on Slimani's grandmother. Out of love, but also as an act of self-empowerment and emancipation from her family, she marries Amine, a Moroccan officer who fought for the French, and goes with him to Morocco, where they start a family. From now on, Mathilde is someone else: for the Moroccans, and for the French; in Morocco, and in France; everywhere, and forever. One understands why Slimani say today, "I've always felt one hundred percent French, and one hundred percent Moroccan."

A great, strong, powerful novel.

Edgar Rai